ACADEMIA International Journal for Social Sciences
Volume 4, Issue 3, 2025 ISSN-L (Online): 3006-6638

Does Optimism Contribute to Self-Esteem Among University Students: A Quantitative Examination

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Received: 15-06-2025 **Revised:** 28-07-2025 **Accepted:** 10-08-2025 **Published:** 26-08-2025

ABSTRACT

The purpose of this study was to investigate the relationship between optimism and self-esteem. It also explored differences in optimism and self-esteem based on gender, education category, and socioeconomic status. The study employed a cross-sectional correlational design and used purposive sampling technique. Data were collected from 300 men and femen students using self-report questionnaires, including the Life Orientation Test and the Rosenberg Self-Esteem Scale. The results indicated acceptable alpha reliability for the study scales. The findings supported the hypothesis of a positive correlation between optimism and self-esteem. Gender-based mean scores differences showed that women scored slightly higher on optimism and lower on self-esteem; whereas men scored slightly higher on self-esteem and low on optimism, however, these differences were statistically non-significant. Regarding education categories, the mean scores indicated that the students enrolled in Master in Arts program (MA) scored higher on optimism than the students enrolled in Master in Science program (MSc) and students enrolled in study program of Doctor of Physiotherapy (DPT). However, differences in self-esteem scores among students of these three study programs were not statistically significant. Additionally, the results showed that mean differences in the study variables were also non-significant with reference to socioeconomic status of the student. Results of the study are discussed in the context of past studies. Conclusion is drawn from the results of the present study.

Keywords: *Optimism, Self-esteem, Gender, Educational level, University Students*

INTRODUCTION

Self-esteem is a sense of respect for oneself and one's potential. It refers to an individual's belief about him or herself; it is basically self-judgment and opinions regarding personal value, i.e., the way a person thinks he or she matters (Alyaa et al., 2025; Rosenberg, 1965, Wani, 2017). People lacking healthy self-esteem remain unsuccessful in dealing with life challenges or staying happy (Branden, 2007). Self-esteem is a key psychological construct to lead a happy life. Literature indicates that successful experiences boost self-esteem, while failure or rejection results in low self-esteem (Mruk, 2006). Self-esteem is also seen as a key aspect for development from adolescence to adulthood (Chub et al., 1997).

In addition, high self-esteem facilitates developing constructive relationships with the environment. As self-esteem is high, one does not permit themselves to feel inferior. High self-esteem enhances the mental status, which enhances coping ability and reduces susceptibility to depression (Birndorf et al., 2010). Low self-esteem is a barrier between an individual and his or her aspirations. Low self-esteem hinders positive thoughts about oneself and others. Theorists expand on how individuals with low self-esteem tend to be more involved in dangerous activities (Wild et al., 2004). If individuals with whatever degree of self-esteem sees themselves as deserving, this has a positive impact on well-being (Diener, 1984, Duy & Yildiz, 2017).

The word optimism is used to indicate the expectation that good things will happen or something anticipated will occur. Optimism has positive impacts on people (Scheier & Carver, 1985; Carver et al., 2010; Segerstrom et al., 2017). It is the belief of dealing with both positive and negative circumstances whereby people define failure as a temporary condition, do not become depressed, and are in good health (Scheier et al., 2001; Seligman, 1990). Optimism is regarded as a behavioral skill that allows individuals to be healthier physically, more prosperous, and happier (Lopez & Snyder, 2003). Optimists are also academically better (Aspinwall & Taylor, 1992) and do better in their careers (Long, 1993). Happiness is also closely related to optimism (Gorsy & Panwar, 2016). Optimism and self-esteem have positive relationship as observed by Arshad (2015) that good self-esteem is good in all respects for an individual.

Previous studies have primarily worked with pessimism and low self-esteem. The current study lays stress on illustrations of the given variables and tries to quantify the relationship between optimism and self-esteem in university students. It explores how optimistic thinking influences self-esteem and stresses various dimenions of the issue. For instance, Firdous (2017) explored the optimism and self-esteem levels of Women students in public and private institutions in Lahore. The findings showed the levels of self-esteem varied significantly, as private-sector students had higher self-esteem, which was highly correlated with socioeconomic status.

Seligman (2008) has documented that optimism has great influence on psychological and mental well-being, lowering stress and enhancing immune system function. Likewise, Siddique et al. (2006) established that optimism is highly associated with self-efficacy, predicting that highly able students with high optimism perform better in their academic work. Earlier research (Gardner, 1981; Holland, 1985; Super, 1980) has observed that adolescents with high self-esteem possess more definite self-concepts, career aspirations, and decision-making skills than those with low self-esteem.

Studies have also uncovered gender differences on optimism and self-esteem. Some of the studies discovered have that men have greater optimism and self-esteem compared to women (Birndorf et al., 2005; Puskar et al., 1999; Sung et al., 2006). Pritchard et al. (2007) associated negative moods with low self-esteem and hypothesized that low self-esteem individuals exhibit more negative behaviors. Low self-esteem has also been linked with drug addiction (Furnham & Lowick, 1984) and suicide in various cultures and ages. Optimism and self-esteem are also connected to subjective well-being that comprises of life satisfaction, positive affect, and lower negative affect (Diener, 2000; Diener et al., 2002, as cited in Duy, 2017).

Trzesniewski et al. (2006) reported that low self-esteem is risky for physical and mental well-being and is linked with increased instances of illegal activity. Trzesniewski and Robins (2006) reported that self-esteem peaks in childhood, drops during adolescence particularly for women, increases later in adulthood, and falls in old age. Sung, et al (2006) also reported that men had greater self-esteem than women in rural communities. Twinomugisha (2008, cited in Ahmat, 2018) carried out a research on university students in East Africa and discovered that self-esteem was positively correlated with academic achievement, although there were gender differences, wherein men` self-esteem increased as grades improved, whereas women` self-esteem decreased even when there was equal performance.

Sadaat, et al. (2012, as cited in Mahmood, 2015) conducted research on self-esteem and academic performance among university students, demonstrating considerable differences between men and femen students across different fields including education, psychology, and computer science. Literature also indicates minority groups have lower self-esteem compared to majority groups (Gordon, 1971; Heiss & Owens, 1972; Hurstfield, 1978; Lefebvre, 1973; Martinez & Dukes, 1987; Turner & Turner, 1982). Schweizer, et al. (1999) found that optimism positively influences well-being, while Strassle, et al. (1999) reported that optimism correlates with mental health and life satisfaction. Optimism has also been associated with workplace outcomes. Kluemper (2009) argued that optimism is linked with essential organizational results, while Strivastava et al. (2006) found that it promotes

better social functioning, long-term friendships, and reduced social isolation. Likewise, Medlin and Green (2009) demonstrated that optimism is positively correlated with attitude and performance within and outside the workplace.

METHOD

Problem Statement

The study aimed to investigate correlation between optimism and self-esteem among university students and explore differences on optimism and self-esteem across demographic characteristics of the students.

Research Design

The study adopted a cross-sectional correlational design to examine the relationship between optimism and self-esteem among students of the University of Balochistan.

Objectives of the Study

- To investigate the correlation between optimism and self-esteem among university students.
- To explore differences in optimism and self-esteem based on gender, education category, and socioeconomic status.

Hypotheses

H1: There will be a positive correlation between optimism and self-esteem.

H2: There are likely to be significant mean differences between genders (men and women) with respect to the study variables, optimism and self-esteem.

H3: There are likely to be significant mean differences between educational groups (MA, MSc, DPT) with respect to the study variables, optimism and self-esteem.

H4: There are likely to be significant mean differences based on socioeconomic status with respect to the study variables, optimism and self-esteem.

Sample

Through purposive technique of sampling, a total of 300 students from the University of Balochistan were sampled, consisting of 150 men and 150 Women students, with a minimum age of 18. The students were enrolled in various disciplines, including Arts, Science, and professional degree programs.

Questionnaire

Rosenberg's self-esteem scale was applied to assess self-worth. It was created by Rosenberg (1965). Ten items on Rosenberg's self-esteem scale are rated on a four-point response options scale from 0 =strongly agree 1=agree 2=disagree 3=strongly disagree. The item numbers 1,3,4,7 and 10 are reverse scoring. The potential scores on the scale range from 0-30. Scores of 15-25 fall in average range of self-esteem and scores of below 15 indicate low self-esteem.

Optimism

Scheier and Carver (1987) created a scale to quantify optimism. The scale has 10 ten items. The response options range from strongly disagree to strongly agree. Out of the ten optimism items, three

items are used to assess pessimism which when reversed are used to assess optimism, and three assess optimism while 4 items are fillers which are not scored for analysis, the values include 0=strongly disagree,1= disagree,2=neutral,3=agree,4= strongly agree.

Ethical Consideration and Procedure

APA 7 ethical standards were followed. Departmental approval was obtained before the start of the study, and authors were contacted via email to obtain permission for the use of scales. Participants were approached using a consent form, which clearly stated voluntary participation and the right to withdraw at any stage. After signing the consent form, participants completed demographic and study questionnaires. The data were gathered through questionnaires and subsequently analyzed using SPSS (Version 21).

RESULT

Table 1

Correlational Analysis between Optimism and Self-esteem (N=300).

Variables	1	2
1.Optimism	-	.30**
2.Self-esteem		-

Note. ***p<.01*

The above table depicts there is moderate positive and significant relationship between optimism and self-esteem.

Table 2

Gender Differences in Mean Scores on Optimism and Self-Esteem (N = 300)

	Men (n = 150)		Women (N = 150)				
Variable	*M*	*SD*	*M*	*SD*	*t*	*p*	Cohen 's *d*
Optimism	19.96	2.69	20.0	2.40	-.294	>.05	0.01
Self-esteem	19.30	3.57	18.53	3.68	1.82	>.05	0.21

The above table demonstrates that women scored slightly higher on optimism and lower on self-esteem but these differences were statistically non-significant on both the study variables.

Table 3

Mean Scores Differences on Optimism and Self-esteem based on Education Category (N = 300)

Variable	Education	*N*	*M*	*SD*	*F*	*P*
Optimism	*MSc*	100	19.85	4.457	4.567	<.05
	MA	100	21.04	1.657		
	DPT	100	20.78	1.761		
Self-esteem	*MSc*	100	19.17	3.819	.436	>.05
	MA	100	18.89	3.725		
	DPT	100	18.69	3.395		

The results indicate that there are slight differences in mean scores on optimism and self-esteem among three different education categories. The differences on Optimism are significant $p<.05$ and non-significant on Self-esteem.

Table 4
Difference in Mean and Standard Deviation of Participants on Optimism and Self-esteem based on Socioeconomic Status (N = 300)

Variable	*Status*	*N*	*M*	*SD*	*F*	*P*
Optimism	*Lower*	29	20.31	2.33	.132	>.05
	Middle	208	20.56	3.26		
	Elite	63	20.65	2.05		
Self-esteem	*Low*	29	19.20	3.94	.182	>.05
	Middle	208	18.83	3.49		
	Elite	63	19.04	4.04		

The results in the above table indicate that there are slight mean scores differences among three different socio-economic groups. However, these differences are statistically non-significant.

DISCUSSION

The present study aimed to examine correlation of optimism with self-esteem and to explore if there were any mean scores differences on the study variables across gender, education category, and socioeconomic status. Under the objectives of the study, hypotheses were formulated regarding the relationship of the variables and mean score differences in the light of the previously reported findings in the literature. The results provided support to the first hypothesis of assumed positive relationship between optimism and self-esteem. It indicates that high level of optimism among students enhances their level of self-esteem. It suggests that when a person maintains an optimistic mindset, he or she will experience enhanced level of self-esteem. Seligman (1991) documented that optimism and self-esteem are connected to each other since optimism is held accountable for developing high self-esteem. With reference to gender differences, the findings of present study indicated that there exist slight gender differences. Women reported little greater but statistically non-significant level of optimism and men reported slightly greater but statistically non-significant level of self-esteem. These finding rendered the second and third hypothesis of the present study as not supported. The literature has offered a wide range of findings on gender differences concerning optimism and self-esteem. Some studies have observed greater self-esteem among men (Birndorf et al.2005; Kling et al., 1999; Puskar et al, 1999; Sung et al.2006). Moreover, Data in the present study revealed significant mean score differences on optimism but non-significant on self-esteem based on education category. Moreover, No significant differences were observed on optimism and self-esteem based on socioeconomic status. In contrast to these findings, a study by Sadat, et al (2012) reported that students from different departments or domain such as education science, psychology computer had varying levels of self-esteem.

CONCLUSION

The present study established a positive correlation between optimism and self-esteem among university students, confirming that higher optimism is linked with stronger self-esteem. Gender-based differences showed that women reported slightly higher optimism, while men reported slightly higher self-esteem; however, these differences were not statistically significant. Educational groups revealed

that students enrolled in the Master in Arts program scored significantly higher on optimism compared to Master in Science and Doctor of Physiotherapy students, though self-esteem did not differ across programs. Socioeconomic status also showed no significant influence on either variable. These findings highlight the central role of optimism in enhancing self-esteem, regardless of demographic background. The study contributes to existing literature by clarifying how optimism and self-esteem interact within the cultural context of Pakistani university students.

Recommendation

Since the results of this study anticipated that there is a positive correlation between optimism and self-esteem, therefore, students need to adopt an optimistic way or attitude to develop their self-esteem. But another suggestion to this study is a lot of time duration should be allocated so that data could be gathered from a larger number of universities.

Limitation

There were a number of limitations for the current research study. Among which one was the short time span due to which the research study area was restricted to University of Balochistan. More over self-report questionnaires, and cross sectional nature of the study are among the limitations of the present study. Future studies may include participants from across the universities and colleges to increase the generalizability of the findings and longitudinal data may be used to examine if there are any time related variations in the relationship of optimism with self-esteem.

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Implications

The research outcomes of present study create a significant window of understanding the impact of optimism on self-esteem. It provides the ground for future research on the two constructs of positive psychology and it highlights the need for instilling positive frame of mind among students regarding their future.

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